

MEETING OF THE PERMIT EFFICIENCY TASK FORCE

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 11, 2005 7:00 P.M.
TWIN PINES SENIOR AND COMMUNITY CENTER
20 TWIN PINES LANE
(FORMERLY, 1223 RALSTON AVENUE)**

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Planning and Community Development Director Craig Ewing

1. ROLL CALL

Dave Warden, Phil Mathewson, Bill Dickenson, Jacki Horton, Steve Simpson, Brian Korn, Jerry Steinberg, Colette Sylver, Ken Hall, and Will Markle. (Absent: Rick Frautschi.) Staff present: Director Craig Ewing, Building Official Mark Nolfi, and Principal Planner Carlos de Melo.

2. AGENDA AMENDMENTS

No amendments.

3. CONSENT CALENDAR

Mathewson / Hall to approve minutes of 4/6/05 - unanimous.

4. OTHER BUSINESS

a. Review Example of Project Review – Garage Addition

Director Ewing presented a recent example of an over-the-counter review for a garage addition, noting that the project presented a number of zoning concerns, including slope calculations, illegal conversion, encroachments into the right-of-way and several development standards. He also noted that the authority of the Director was needed to provide a reasonable alternative for calculation slope and allow the applicant to make a modest addition to an existing garage. The Task Force noted:

- Question of public benefit for additional parking
- The project and staff review actions are not uncommon for any city
- One Task Force member spoke with applicant who shared that she was disappointed with first Permit Center interaction, but satisfied with second meeting
- First contact is vital to avoiding later problems
- The city can shift the liability for an accurate project from staff to the architect
- Appointments with senior staff outside of the counter hours could help

b. Review Customer Surveys Responses

The surveys were reviewed, including one new response distributed at the meeting. Director Ewing summarized staff's findings, noting specific suggestions for a larger meeting room, building inspectors to advise what they want on next inspection, quicker turnaround times, better

documentation about process (especially time and, cost), expedited processing and less interference by arborist. The Task Force discussed

- Many cities hold comments on building plan checks until all departments have submitted – applicant could begin working on some corrections while others are pending
- How some corrections are addressed may affect others; it's better to have them all at once
- Time is always a concern – applicants have full building plan sets prepared before PC approval
- City has performance standards on plan check turn-around – 10, 14 and 21 days, depending on the project's scope or status
- State has time limits on responding to applications – 30 days to determine whether or not application is complete.
- Planning process should run more like the building plan check / permit process
- Staff distinguishes between completeness (all materials are received) and compliance (all zoning standards are met)

c. Review Comparison of Other Cities' Procedures for Single Family Review

Director Ewing presented a chart of the single family design review procedures for cities in San Mateo County, noting that each city has a somewhat different approach. Belmont appears to have the greatest level of review, but not overwhelmingly greater than two or three other cities. He also noted that San Carlos' staff mentioned that their design review is somewhat informal with one staff member and 3 board members. It is important to understand what the community's expectations are on what the Commission is to discuss / decide. On the subject of design guidelines, many cities have them but it is not clear which ones work well. Belmont has discussed obtaining guidelines, but there has been no Council direction to prepare them and we have thus far not chosen to review architectural style. The Task Force noted:

- The City could focus on site planning, hardscape, bulk & massing, instead of style
- "Form coding" could be introduced – it is used by Redwood City and Petaluma
- Menlo Park and San Mateo are among the more restrictive and they are reviewing their procedures for change
- A private architectural review board improved the Nikon project – can a professional ARC be used in single family design review?
- A 'middle board' is needed to deal with smaller additions
- Neighborhood outreach has helped smooth over problems before the Commission hearing
- Convert the zoning ordinance to pictures to describe terms such as "bulk"

d. Brainstorm Recommendations for Improvements to Belmont Permitting Procedures

Director Ewing conducted a "brainstorm" session with the Task Force to identify ideas for improving the City's permitting procedures. Ideas offered were:

- Handbook and Design Guidelines (w/ graphics)
- "Check to Shovel" – explain timelines / expectations
- Tiered Planning process – more staff review
- Cost expectations – all inclusive
- "This – not That" – dumb-downed Belmont Zoning Ordinance
- Performance (10, 14, 21 day) measures for Planning
- Triggers for Entitlements (& costs)
- Sensitivity to "first contact" w/ staff
- Pre-application meeting

- Twice yearly zoning / building seminar
 - Set aside appointments (2 days) for initial submittals
 - Over-the-counter permits
 - One-stop appointments w/ all department representatives
 - One-stop “must-have” rules (No napkin sets)
 - Lot slope would require architect attendance
 - Additional revisions (3 or more) require subsequent fees for SFDR
 - Use of deposits instead of additional fees
 - Higher fee – faster service
 - Staff approval of final landscape plan (landscape contractor) – higher fee?
 - Standard condition of approval: landscaping as final signoff – 90 days after signoff – landscape installed
 - Collect a bond to guarantee installation (Belvedere example)
 - Decide what is an acceptable time frame for SFDR (2 months, 3 months?)
 - “Unconnected” coach – Architects should do that & staff – give project advice
 - Thresholds for Commission review or Non-PC review:
 - Flex hours – open to 7 p.m. or open at 7 a.m.
- “Middle Tier” (between over-the-counter and Commission)
 - Any project meeting all development standards (height, FAR, setbacks)
 - 400 sf – OTC; 400-1000 sf – middle tier; over 1000 sf to PC
 - All first floors to staff; 2nd story additions to PC
 - Do not dilute SFDR process; get back to original goals & timelines
 - Strategic resources (planner available for OTC review of projects)
 - Do we need geo-tech reports at PC level (why not at building permit level); look at specific finding for geo feasibility – is it appropriate at that time – tweak the finding
 - Neighbors expect city to know everything about a project (piers, geo-tech)
 - Up front costs (earlier in process) to know what the City is getting
 - Full-size sets of plans?
 - Length of staff reports
 - Identify why staff reports are so long; compare 2005 to 2000

e. Identify Priority List of Recommended Improvements

No action was taken on this item – staff will present the list of ideas to the Task Force by e-mail and seek priorities prior to next meeting.

5. NEXT MEETING

The Task Force agreed that its next meeting would be Wednesday, June 8th at 7 p.m. in a conference room in the remodeled City Hall.

6. COMMUNITY FORUM (Public Comments)

(No speakers)

7. ADJOURNMENT

9:22 p.m.